Castlemaine Naturalist

November 2014

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Hoary-headed Grebes - breeding pair, Crusoe res.
photo by Noel Young

The Garden Orb Weaver Show

Lynne Kelly

The 2014 free show in the back yard has started! The orb weavers are spinning their little webs. They'll grow over the next few months until some webs are a metre or more across. The most common around Castlemaine are the knobbed orb weavers, *Eriophora pustulosa*. One of the group of garden orb weavers, *Eriophora* typically take down the web each morning to rebuild each night. They leave a single main strand across a gap in the hope they can reuse it the next night. I have noticed that the knobbed orb weaver takes down its web in the morning less reliably than others in the genus.

The best thing about the garden orb weavers is that you can get to know an individual because they stay in the same location all season. You can watch them weave their web each night. They emerge just after dark from a hiding place at the edge of the web where they have been scrunched up so well they are often hard to see. You can see them constantly repair their webs, catch food, eat and, hopefully, survive the multitude of predators which threaten them daily.

In the heat of the summer, spiders are vulnerable to desiccation. I lightly water my spiders on very hot days and they come out to drink – gratefully, I like to believe. To achieve that sort of closeness over many months with an animal in the wild is really rare. And the arachnid entertainment is free at your back door!

Left: The spider I called Wonderful weaving her orb. The knobbed orb weaver is distinguished by the two bumps on the front of the abdomen (typical of Eriophora) and three bumps on the upper end of the abdomen (distinctive in E. pustulosa).

Right: Wonderful always emerged within a minute of me spraying her leaf retreat to drink. The droplet-less part of the leaf above her head is where she has already absorbed the precious water.

November Excursion - Pudding Bag Lane Nature Reserve

The November excursion will be on Saturday 15th November to Pudding Bag Lane Nature Reserve and a nearby reserve called Lauriston nature Conservation Reserve. Both reserves are excellent wildflower spots and being a bit further south (near Drummond) hopefully not as dry as the Castlemaine bush!

We will have a local guide for the excursion in the form of John Walter from Malmsbury District Landcare group. John lives nearby the reserves and will be able to show us some of the rarer plants found in them including the Fryerstown Grevillea.

We will leave the 'octopus' car park in Forest Street at 1:30pm.

Max Schlachter

Wednesday Wildflower Walk 1/10/14

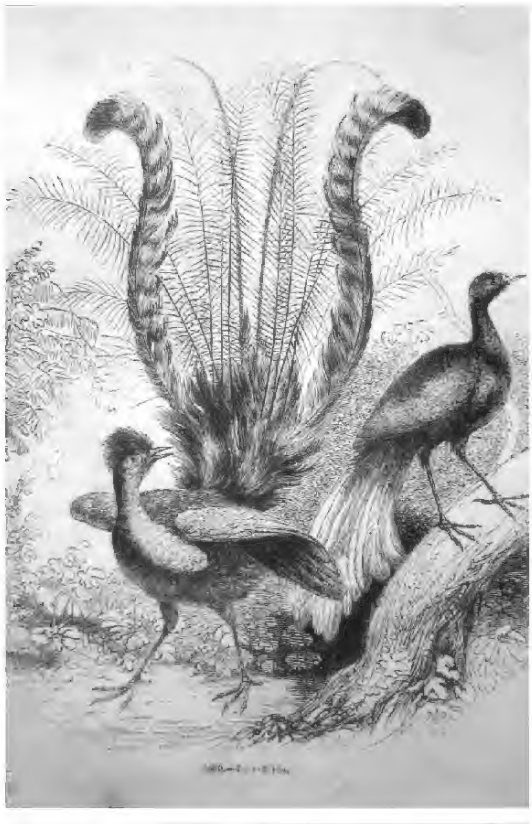
Boundary Track West (Burnt) / adjacent block - with Geraldine Harris
Cool evening with patches of sunshine 4 - 5.30pm

Acacia acinacea	Gold-dust Wattle
Acrotriche serrulata	Honey-pots n/f
Arthropodium strictum	Chocolate Lily
Brachyloma daphnoides	Daphne Heath
Brunonia australis	Blue Pincushion n/f
Calochilus robertsonii	Purple Beard Orchid
Cassinia arcuata	Coffee Bush n/f
Cassytha glabella	Slender Dodder-laurel n/f
Craspedia variabilis	Billy-buttons
Daviesia ulicifolia	Gorse Bitter-pea
Dianella admixta	Black-anther Flax-lily
Dillwynia sericea	Showy Parrot-pea
Diuris pardina	Leopard Orchid (in seed)
Drosera auriculata	Tall Sundew
Eucalyptus macrorhyncha	Red Stringybark
Eucalyptus melliodora	Yellow Gum
Eucalyptus microcarpa	Grey Box
Exocarpos cupressiformis	Cherry Ballart
Glossodia major	Waxlip Orchid
Gonocarpus tetragynus	Common Raspwort n/f
Grevillea alpina	Downy Grevillea
Hakea decurrens	Bushy Needlewood n/f
Hibbertia exutiacies	Spiky Guinea-flower
Hovea heterophylla	Common Hovea n/f
Levenhookia dubia	Hairy Stylewort
Lomandra multiflora	Many-flowered Mat-rush
Microseris sp.	Yam Daisy
Ozothamnus obcordatus	Grey Everlasting
Pelargonium rodneyanum	Magenta Stork's-bill n/f
Philotheca verrucosa	Fairy Wax-flower
Pimelea linifolia	Slender Rice-flower
Poa sp.	Tussock Grass
Podolepis jaceoides	Showy Podolepis
Pultenaea laxiflora	Loose-flower Bush-pea
Siloxerus multiflorus	Small Wrinklewort
Rhytidosporum procumbens	White Marianth
Stackhousia monogyna	Creamy Candles
Stylidium amara (graminifolium)	Grass Trigger-plant (in bud)
Tetratheca ciliata	Pink Bells
Thelymitra antennifera	Rabbits ears
Thelymitra megcalyptra	Scented Sun Orchid
Thysanotus patersonii	Twining Fringe-lily
Veronica plebeia	Trailing Speedwell n/f
Wurmbea dioica	Early Nancy
Xerochrysum viscosum	Sticky Everlasting

An Early Interest In Nature

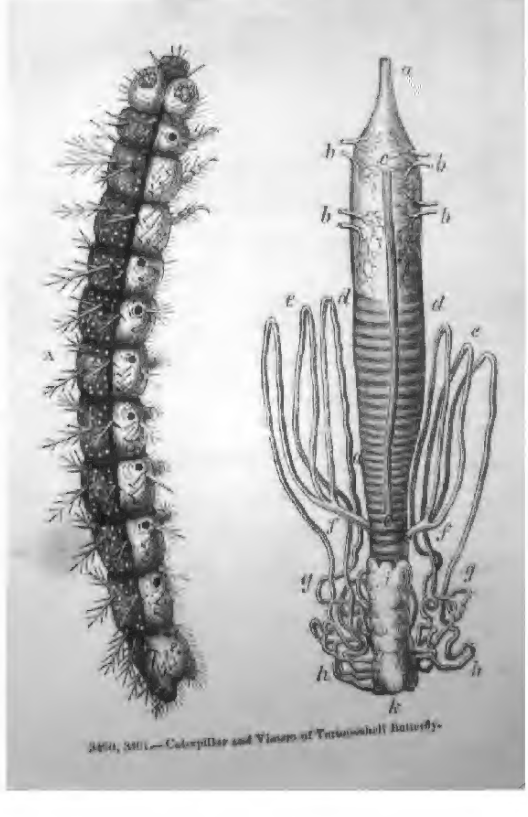
Joy Weatherill

Some time ago, Geraldine wrote about her early childhood experiences with nature, and challenged other members of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club to do the same; but I think only Chris Timewell, Rita and Noel have done this.



All my interest in such things - bushwalking, observing, collecting, identifying and displaying, was given to me by my Father, who himself was interested in natural history. As children, we were taken to Point Lonsdale for holidays. I armed myself with binos and a copy of Leach's "Australian Bird Book", and was rewarded with a never-ending source of new discoveries; things like the dried out Leafy Sea Dragon, washed up on the surf beach (I'm giving it to my grandson for Christrmas along with my shell collection). Also washed up - shells, shark eggs, an albatross which my father told me was a Wandering albatross, the odd penguin and seal; fossilized sea urchins from the cliffs at Torquay.

There was a beautiful range of wildflowers in the bush, which was most of Point Lonsdale at that time. Everything I collected was carefully named. What had originally been the outside loo where we lived in North Balwyn, was given a concrete floor, and became for me an area where I could store and display all my collections in a large old chest of draws - shells, rocks, insects.



Insects were collected, set and mounted in glass-topped display cases made by Dad. My father made several donations of finds to the Museum of Victoria. (Still have correspondence relating to all this) including a trilobite which was found when a new road was made in North Balwyn. This was all very exciting.

At the Museum, when Dad mentioned my interests, they gave him special film for putting

over insects wings when they were set, extra fine non-rusting pins for putting through the thorax - wings set at a certain angle and insect laid in a special setting board with a slot for the body - until it dried out completely. Because it was necessary to do all this before rigor mortis set in, insects needed to be killed quickly. (1 couldn't do this now). The Museum gave Dad a killing jar containing cyanide in the base - set in plaster of Paris to make it safer. Dad said "wash your hands after using it" And I was left to my own devices!

Another great inspiration for me was a very large tome - "Book of Animated Nature"- handed down from an earlier relative - inscribed in the front in beautiful copperplate writing and dated 1878. I often referred to this, and often just paged through, marvelling at all the intricacy of the natural world. I still look at this book.

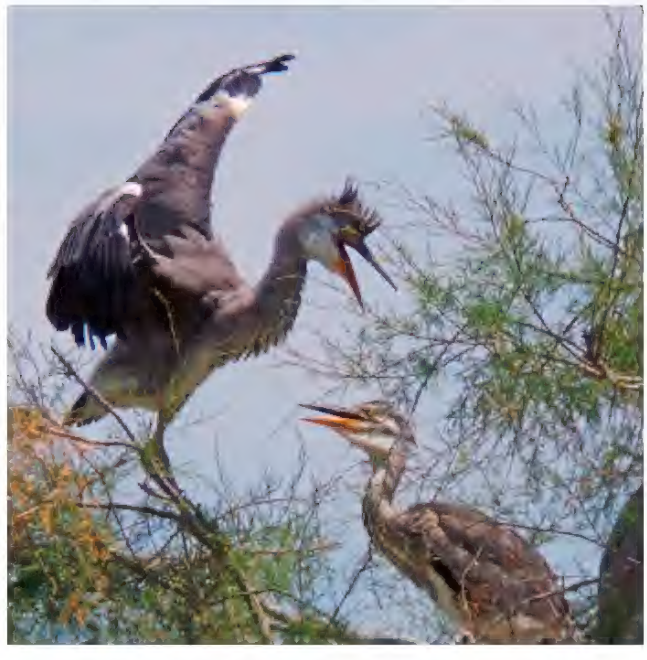
So I include with this article, a couple of photos of the above book, and some photos of rocks and shells from the surf beach at Point Lonsdale. It pays to take a closer look at the beautiful detail in nature.

Birding in Europe

Damian Kelly

The Camargue

This is huge flood plain in the south of France about 20km from Arles, with the Parc ornithologique de Pont-de-Gau a great place for birding. In some ways it reminded me of outback NSW up Macquarie Marshes way - wide areas of swampy water, wild boar, cotton farms, a bushfire and the heat! Known for its mosquitoes we were advised to come prepared, but it was so hot during our visit that there were none to be seen. There is easy access on the local bus from Arles - 2 Euro for a 20km trip is pretty good. This place provides for birding in style - friendly rangers, excellent and educational signage, lots of paths and of course, as only the French can do, a bar by the water at the end of your long hot walk where you can watch nesting herons whilst sipping a cool beer!



Amongst the birds highlights included Flamingos and Grey Herons feeding young. The large flocks of Pink Flamingoes are one of the most spectacular sites. Mammals provided a surprise with Coypu and a few Beaver - easy to watch from the shade of the bar.

Norfolk

Unlike Australia, birding is a very popular and high profile activity in the UK and Titchwell Marsh is a good example. They aim to encourage visitors, so dogs on leads are acceptable. Until recently dogs were even allowed in the bird hides, but this is changing with signs there recently asking people to leave them outside. Family groups and lots of children are a common sight as are groups of photographers with serious big white lenses and very expensive spotting scopes.

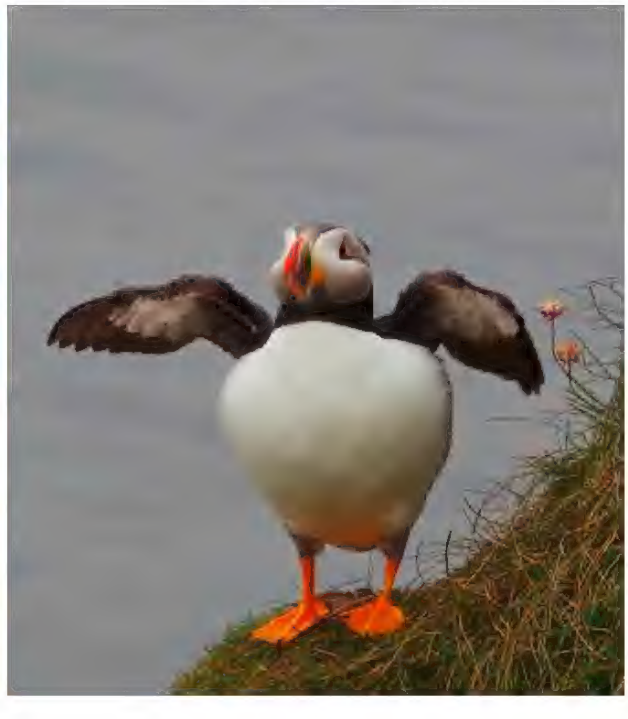
You know they are serious about birding when you see a sign: Stone Curlew 1 mile. So we made a quick detour to see a group of them out in an open paddock. This was near Lakenheath - a large area of marsh with a wide range of birds. What you don't realise until you get there is that next door is Lakeneath air base so we had to endure regular noisy fly-bys of trainee fighter pilots practising take-offs and landings in a big loop. The birds didn't seem to notice, but we found it rather jarring.

Orkney

To the far north off the coast of Scotland, Orkney is a remarkable place. Without a doubt one of my favourite places anywhere. Birdwatching can be had everywhere with owls active during the day - there is very little night in summer so that they have to hunt in daylight. Big mobs of Oystercatchers feeding in town on the football ground were a surprise and along the rural roads it is common to see Oystercatcher, Curlew and Snipe sitting on fence posts - no need to go stalking for these. And for me the highlight is always to go out on the cliffs for great views of Puffins, Guillmots, Great Skuas and a myriad of other sea birds.

Short-eared owl

Puffin



Life History of a Diurnal Lepidopterist

Tony Morton

It was wartime, 1943. My father worked for the Indian Civil Service in Delhi. Aged eight, I was sent to boarding school in Simla, at B.C.S. (Bishop Cotton's School otherwise known as Best Cooked Sausages). Simla lies at some 7,000 feet in the Himalayas, and because of the long, snowy winter we had a three month holiday then and two ten-day holidays separating the three terms. There was a large buddleia bush at the edge of the sports field, and several of us would swipe away with our nets at the wonderful variety of butterflies that came along in plenty. I've still got a few in one of my cases, finally mounted after following me around in a cigar box for forty years!

We had our own names for them, the 'Peacock Monal' *(Papilio paris)* was a prize, as were the other Swallowtails *(polyctor, krishna, palinurus)*, which we called Monals indiscriminately. My father told me that Monal was the vernacular name for the Himalayan Pheasant, which also has a magnificent iridescent blue and green plumage. Then there were the 'Rice Monals', *(P. polytes,* perhaps) called this because of the white spots along the termens of the wings, shaped like grains of rice. Others were just 'Riceys'. I imagine these must have been various *Euploeas.* We called *P. demoleus* the 'Cornflower', *Cyrestis thyodamus* the 'Mappy', *Junonia orithya* the 'Lady's Fancy', *J. hierta* the 'Gentleman's Fancy', *Kaninska canace* the 'Blue Admiral'. There were also many Little Brown Jobs (probably *Ypthimas*) we saw on walks. We called them 'Hoppys' and believed they were a sign of rain coming! I'm ashamed to say we took no notice of the Blues and Skippers (which are of such great interest to me now), considering them of no use to man nor beast!

Some of us kept large beetles, Stag, Rhinoceros, Hercules, in our pockets, happily sucking on a quarter of apple, making a contented buzzing sound (the beetles, not us!). We would put them on the table and try to make them 'fight'. They would lumber towards each other, often missing their opponent but sometimes colliding. When they did, it was usually the Rhino that would 'win'. His frontal 'horn' could tip the opposing beetle over on its back. A cheer would go up.

Then it would be supper time. We sat in tables of eight. The 'bearers' always impressed me enormously. They would be loaded up with eight full plates, four on each arm, and serve the whole table by shrugging each pair down their arms until the last pair was in their hands! I don't remember one plate ever being dropped. I longed to be a bearer when I grew up.

During one ten day holiday I stayed with my mother in a Simla hotel. My father couldn't get away from Delhi because of work. I met a delightful man whom I later realized was a real collector, but of moths. His room smelt splendidly scientific for

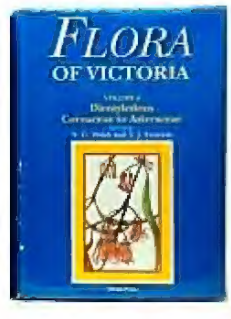
it was also his laboratory. He was breeding moths in cages. We went out after nightfall and walked round the streets of Simla seeing what moths had been attracted to street lights. He gave me the cocoon of an Indian Moon Moth. I kept it in a box for a long time. Eventually the moth emerged and the most beautiful thing it was, pale green with pinkish veining and astonishingly long, delicate tails.

Then we went back to England where I found things very dull by comparison, though I do remember a wonderful flight of Clouded Yellows *(Colias croceus)* in autumn 1947, I think. Cricket and football were now claiming my attention. They seemed important to me then, though now I feel my spare time could have been far better spent studying Natural History! Besides, instead of playing Army cricket in Hong Kong, where I was doing National Service, I could have been sitting at the feet of Colonel J. N. Eliot, specialist in the *Lycaenidae*, who was serving there too in 1955. I only discovered this years later. It was also years later that I found out that I had spent a year in Switzerland almost next door to Vladimir Nabokov, novelist and taxonomist, particularly expert on Alpine butterflies. He was living in a Montreux hotel at the time, 1966. I was teaching at a school nearby wasting time again coaching various sports instead of getting to know Nabokov who by then, I believe, only had time for, and was only civil to, other butterfly collectors!

But all was not lost! In 1969 I came to Melbourne and though Victoria has only about 100 species of butterfly, and the whole of Australia only about 400 (compare this with the island of Singapore which has (alas, now, had?) 1200 species at least!), I found a lot of my old friends from the buddleia bush in Simla here, especially in North Queensland, and have been very interested in them ever since.

Now (2014), worried about the collection as I was losing interest and not taking care of it, I tried to leave it to an Australian museum, but there was so much 'foreign' material in it they didn't want all of it and I was unwilling to split it up. I also tried the Hope Museum at Oxford, but I would have had to pay for the packing and shipment myself. So I have given it to Florida University (McGuire Institute). This is a highly regarded Institute of Biodiversity. They sent a curator out to stay with us to pack it up and take it away to join the eight million other insect specimens in their collections! So it has gone to the New World – an area where I've never collected! Better than ending up on a bonfire, or being gradually eaten by other insects, I think! We're hoping for an invitation to visit there in due course!

Wanted: Flora of Victoria Volume 4



I realise that this is a bit of a long shot... but if any Field Nats have a copy of the Flora of Victoria Volume 4 (blue cover) that they no longer require I will happily purchase it from them. Contact Max on 0422 130 055 or mschlachter@outlook.com.au.

Making a big splash

Joy Weatherill

It's spring, so if you are a Crested Tern you need to look your best

- Queenscliff, September

Ready for action!

Next meeting will feature Nigel and Anne Harland's trip to India early this year. Starting in Delhi they took in the Taj Mahal before spending the rest of the holiday in three National Parks to the south of Agra. These were Baratpur, Bandhavgarh and Khana. Baratpur is a birdwatcher's paradise, whereas the latter two have many birds but a larger number of mammals.

Those who heard Nigel's talk in early 2013 on the Pantanal in South America were enthralled by his adventures supported by excellent photography.

New map of Kalimna Park

In association with the Friends of Kalimna Park, a detailed topographic map has been made by Jase Haysom. It can be downloaded from his website below in a printable form (as a pdf) or for GPS units

http://cartography.id.au/k_park.htm

Bird count

Don't forget the annual bird count on **Saturday Dec 6**
Meet at 8 am at the Forest st car park
Contact Chris Morris for details

And if you receive this newsletter in time, please note the talk sponsored by Newstead Landcare by **Andrew Skeoch who specialises in recording and analysing **The Natural Soundscape: Birdsong, Music, Evolution and Listening.**
Newstead Community Centre at 7.30 pm Sunday 9th Nov
**[I highly recommend Andrew's presentation - Editor]

Apologies to some: Thank you to all who sent in articles - I have had to hold over some for the next issue - Editor

Observations

At the October meeting -

- George Broadway opened the meeting relating an article in the latest 'Birdlife' magazine about the predicted extinction of the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo in WA owing to the campaign to eliminate 'exotic' Pine trees to which the birds have become dependant
- During the plant survey for a proposed walking track along the Muckleford railway line with Richard, several Crimson Sun-orchids *Thelymitra macmillanii* were found
- Noel heard Clamorous Reed-warblers calling along the Forest creek in Happy Valley this week. George added that they have also returned to their usual habitat - Expedition Pass reservoir

Later -

- At Geraldine's place, a Sacred Kingfisher has returned for the third year. She also encountered a Red bellied Black snake
- Nigel reported a Tiger snake, and has a Willy Wagtail with three chicks in its nest
- Although numbers of birds seem below average this season, on a morning walk along Forest creek between Wesley Hill and Chewton, I listed 25 bird species, including the four cuckoos calling - Pallid, Fantail, Shining Bronze and Horsefield's Bronze - Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri November 14 meeting: speaker NIGEL HARLAND - Wildlife of India

Sat November 15 field trip: Pudding Bag Lane Reserve. Max & Chris

Sat December 6 Annual Bird Count contact Chris Morris

Fri December 12 meeting: Members night

Member's "show and tell" - share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. And bring a plate to share for supper.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2014
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2014 Committee

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